



IRELAND 2040

**Submission to Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government**



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Introduction

Social Justice Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation process on the draft framework of *Ireland 2040*, the National Planning Framework. As noted previously, this is a pivotal moment for the country. *Ireland 2040* will not only shape our spatial strategy and planning framework for the coming decades. It will have a significant bearing on the quality of life and standard of living in all parts of Ireland, since it will outline the priorities that will guide policy and shape decisions for the next two decades.

This is an opportunity to identify the infrastructure that will underpin the social and economic fabric of Ireland over the next quarter of a century. It is an opportunity to develop long-term integrated policy planning, and determine the social infrastructure required to deliver the public services that Irish people, as citizens of a wealthy Western country, expect.

These services and this infrastructure must be properly resourced, and *Ireland 2040* should not only outline details of what these services and infrastructure will be, but should provide a realistic outline of how they are to be delivered and paid for. Clear resource and revenue planning should ensure that the social infrastructure underpinning our society and economy can withstand shocks, support Ireland's changing needs, and adapt to challenges such as climate change, demographic trends, and technological progress and the changing world of work.

We take this opportunity to reiterate the proposals that I made to the Department in the initial consultation. *Ireland 2040* provides Government with the opportunity to deliver positive and lasting change to the island of Ireland. It is therefore vital that there is commitment and consensus on the type of Ireland that people want to live in, and how this can be supported socially, physically and economically. Continued public engagement is vital to achieving consensus on, and commitment to, the type of society that people want.

Social infrastructure

It can't be stated strongly enough that governments never really cut infrastructure investment; they merely postpone it. Doing so over a prolonged period creates an infrastructure deficit that hinders the delivery of public services and leads to lower living standards. The level of capital spending is a good barometer of society's commitment to do what is required to reach the vision it has set out. While it has recently become the norm for senior politicians and some commentators to note that Ireland's level of public investment as a proportion of government expenditure is very high, compared to our international peers, this does not give the full context.

Ireland's public expenditure **as a proportion of national income** is well below the European average. So regardless of how high investment may be as a proportion of overall expenditure, we still compare poorly with our Western European peers. We acknowledge that Budget 2018 increased total voted capital expenditure by €790m (17 per cent) on the previous year from €4.5bn to €5.3bn, and public investment is scheduled to increase from €3.7bn to €7.8bn over the period 2015 to 2021. This is welcome, but still not sufficient, given how Ireland has trailed most of our European counterparts in capital spending for several years.

Ireland 2040 must include a plan to address this infrastructure deficit. Ireland cannot hope to deliver European-average levels of infrastructure and services without matching European-average levels of investment.

Among the key areas that must be targeted are:

- **Housing:** In December 2016 there were 91,600 households¹ on social housing waiting lists. More than any other issue, fixing our social housing crisis requires long-term planning, as well as investment over a number of government-cycles, spanning a number of years. Steps must also be taken to ensure that Ireland's housing output increases from current levels towards the estimated demand of 25,000 to 30,000 per year. Spatial planning is key here, as these new homes will be needed close to the jobs that Ireland plans to attract and develop;
- **Education:** While Ireland's population of 0-18 year olds is the highest in the European Union at 28 per cent, our education expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure is notably below the EU average, at approximately 11 per cent. This is the worst ratio in the European Union². This imbalance should be rectified, and Ireland's investment in education should be brought into line with our European counterparts;
- **Healthcare:** Ireland's ageing population creates a challenge for our current healthcare infrastructure, and *Ireland 2040* should include a comprehensive plan to deal with this. This should include an increase in Primary Care facilities, nursing home and step-down care, and Home Care Packages (HCPs). Decisive measures should also be taken to move towards a European-style, single-tier, public health system that works for citizens of all ages and social backgrounds;
- **Public transport:** Lack of access to transport results in people being unable to access essential services, employment or training, and can lead to social isolation. The development of an affordable integrated public transport network is key to solving these difficulties, as well as meeting our environmental obligations;
- **Rural broadband:** An adequate network of rural broadband is key to ensuring that regions throughout Ireland, particularly those away from the capital city and its surrounds, can maximise economic development.

Health

The core objective of health policy in Ireland should be to provide an adequate healthcare service, focused on enabling people to attain the World Health Organisation's definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Ireland 2040 must acknowledge that long-term planning and investment in the health sector will be necessary, given Ireland's impending demographic changes. Enhancing the process of planning and investment so that the healthcare system can cope with the larger, older and more diverse population projected for the next few decades will be key.

¹ See Housing Agency, <https://www.housingagency.ie/Housing/media/Media/Publications/Summary-of-Social-Housing-Assessment-Needs-2016.pdf>

² Figures from Eurostat

Social Justice Ireland recommends the creation of a statutory entitlement to HCPs. While this will require increased funding, it may save the State money in the long-term, as HCPs allow people to remain living in their own homes, rather than entering residential nursing care. There will also be a need to create additional respite care and long-stay care facilities for older people and people with disabilities, and provide capital investment to build additional community nursing facilities.

As noted above, decisive measures are needed to move towards a European-style, single-tier, public health system. Increasing the availability and quality of Primary Care services should be a priority, and Government must act effectively to ensure that the current hospital waiting list crisis does not become a perpetual issue.

Social Justice Ireland also believes that mental health services must be properly resourced and developed, and that in general *Ireland 2040* should ensure that structural and systematic reform of the health system reflects key principles aimed at achieving high performance, person-centred quality of care, and value for money in the health service. Finally, there needs to be an increase in educational campaigns promoting health, in particular to target people who are economically disadvantaged, acknowledging that a preventative approach saves money in the long-run.

Employment

Unbalanced economic growth hinders Ireland's overall economic potential. Certain regions of Ireland are performing far better than others, with rates of employment growth in the West and South-West, for example, roughly a quarter that of Dublin. Meanwhile unemployment rates in the Mid-East region and Dublin are the lowest in the country³. This is detrimental to the regions, but also to the greater Dublin area, as great strain is put on the capital's housing, education and transport infrastructure. *Ireland 2040* should include provisions to ensure that economic growth is more evenly distributed throughout the country.

Ireland 2040 should anticipate a reconfiguration of the interaction between employment and work, taxation, and welfare. The economy of the future may not provide a quality job for everyone that wants one, and so *Social Justice Ireland* believes that *Ireland 2040* should contain a vision for Ireland that includes the creation of meaningful work and an income sufficient to live life with dignity for all. This would be particularly apt, given the aforementioned technological progress – which will see many skills and forms of work become obsolete – as well as changing demographics, the increasing need for more people in caring roles in society, and the need for a fairer distribution of economic resources.

Within employment, policy must be implemented to ensure a move away from the current labour market trends of increasing precarious and low-paid employment, and towards quality employment that provides a living wage. Other initiatives like refundable tax credits would help tackle the working poor issue whilst better integrating welfare, taxation, and the labour market. *Ireland 2040* should outline a vision for how Ireland in the future will organise income, work and participation in a fair and progressive manner.

³ For more on regional employment trends, see *Social Justice Ireland's* Employment Monitor at <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/4563/gem2final.pdf>

Regional development

A sustainable society requires balanced regional development. The proportion of the population living in and around the capital city is already very high by international standards, and this is continuing to grow. Dublin already accounts for half of economic output in Ireland. Yet we are continuing to model our growth path, and design our public services, in a way that encourages, rather than discourages, such concentration. By continuing to locate a disproportionate amount of our best health, education, and cultural institutions in Dublin, we are driving a model of development that precludes the kind of regional balance required for Ireland to thrive. This must change.

Among the issues that must be taken into consideration is development of an adequate rural broadband network, integrated public transport throughout the regions, and the development of regional economic and social hubs.

One approach to consider is using ‘functional territories’⁴ as a key component of *Ireland 2040*. Regional Economic Development Zones are designed around functional territories (i.e. areas of social and economic activity) as opposed to being bound by traditional administrative boundaries. Using functional territories could be a useful means of developing Ireland’s regional cities and connecting them with larger urban centres, smaller towns, and rural villages and their hinterlands. This can help to develop viable markets, maintain institutions and services, and promote sustainable and thriving regions, towns and villages.

Spatial development and planning are key. *Ireland 2040* plan must identify the services that will be required, based on predicted demographic trends, and the areas in which they will be required. Well-developed policy can influence the spread of population and with it Ireland’s economic development, ensuring that housing, access to employment, and access to health, education and care services are all facilitated by an efficient and comprehensive public transport system.

Maximising the potential of the regions is achievable. It can also contribute to a more sustainable economy and environment. It is important that we have a rebalancing of development in Ireland so that the quality of life and wellbeing of people in all regions is improved. In order to deliver this, people need access to the services and infrastructure expected in a modern Western European country, as they have a direct bearing on their standard of living. *Ireland 2040* must contain proposals to address the growing disparity in the standard of living in rural Ireland versus that in urban areas.

Agriculture plays an important role in rural Ireland and the regions. Though no longer the primary driver of regional economies, it remains an integral component of future regional and rural development. Support for sustainable agricultural practice is important to ensure the long-term viability of the sector, while consideration must also be given to how increases in agricultural emissions, as a result of any development, can be offset.

⁴ <http://iclr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Paper-13-Applying-Functional-Territories-Concept-Jun16-Final.pdf>

Sustainability and the Environment

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits countries to achieving sustainable development in three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner. To deliver this agenda the United Nations has developed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁵. To ensure these three dimensions are valued equally, new measures of progress are required to ensure that economic progress does not come at the expense of social or environmental progress, which has so often been the case to date. This will require a move beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the main indicator of progress, and the development of new indicators to measure progress in areas such as well-being, decent work, sustainable communities, strong institutions and other quality of life indicators.

Social Justice Ireland has recently published a Sustainable Progress Index⁶, examining how Ireland is currently performing on the SDGs. This Index examines Ireland's performance on the economy, society and the environment, and assesses whether Ireland has really made progress in these areas over time, and in comparison to our peers in the EU-15.

Under all three headings, Ireland is performing worse now than it was in 2006. Ireland performs particularly poorly on the environment, falling from 14th in the EU-15 to last over the last decade. What this research highlights is that the economy-only approach does not work: it does not work in addressing social and environmental problems, and ironically, it does not work in improving the performance of the economy. Ireland needs to move beyond GDP and begin measuring progress on areas that impact on people's lives and well-being.

A key challenge for Ireland is to meet our international commitments on sustainable development and climate change. *Ireland 2040* should provide the blueprint that ensures that the economy develops in a sustainable way and that economic growth is not at the expense of environmental protection.

The impact of climate change and extreme weather events on Ireland's environment, society, economy, biodiversity, infrastructure and other sectors is identified as one of the key environmental risks in Ireland's *National Risk Assessment 2016*⁷. Among the predicted adverse impacts of climate change are rising sea levels, an increased likelihood (and magnitude) of river and coastal flooding, adverse impacts on water quality, a decrease in rainfall in spring and summer, an increase in the intensity of storms, and changes in the distribution of plant and animal species⁸. The increased incidence of flooding in Ireland, particularly in 2009 and 2015, highlight the impact of climate change and changing weather patterns.

The long-term goal of a low carbon economy beyond 2020 must be at the core of climate policy, and should be incorporated into *Ireland 2040*. A national sustainable transport network would represent

⁵ <http://www.globalgoals.org/>

⁶ <http://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/sustainable-progress-index-2017>

⁷ http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2016/2016_National_Risk_Assessment.html

⁸

http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/climate/EPA%20159_Ensemble%20of%20regional%20climate%20model%20projections%20for%20Ireland.pdf

a major step towards a low carbon, resource efficient economy. This requires mapping, the use of existing demographic projections, and spatial planning to develop complementary housing, transportation, health and education infrastructure. Our public transport network should be designed to not only reduce emissions and meet our environmental targets, but to connect people to places of employment, education services and health services.

Unfortunately, Ireland does not have a good record as an international leader in terms of emissions reductions and other environmental targets. For example, according to a report by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, if Ireland were to reach its 2020 renewable energy and emissions reduction targets it would avoid the associated compliance costs; between €65m and €130m per percentage shortfall on the overall binding target. However, if the Environmental Protection Agency's current projections are met, Ireland's fines could amount to around €1bn. Such a situation cannot continue.

Conclusions

Most Irish citizens would aspire to living in the society we are proposing. However, it must be acknowledged that this costs money. Choices must be made and agreement reached on how this society is to be delivered. This includes whether this cost is to be met by increasing taxation, by imposing, or increasing, charges, by increasing efficiency or through the private sector.

A broadening of the tax base will be required together with an increase in the total tax-take towards the European average. Most Western European societies provide a far more comprehensive programme of public services and social infrastructure. Therefore, if we wish to emulate these countries, we must secure a level of revenue similar to these countries.

Social Justice Ireland believes that a fair and just society, underpinned by a thriving sustainable economy, is possible, but can only be delivered if all people who are affected are represented and have their say on the issues that affect them.

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think-tank and justice advocacy organisation of individuals and groups throughout Ireland who are committed to working to build a just society where human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated and the environment is respected and protected.

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